# Radical Grace and the Economy

## Module III. Denial of Abundance

This is *Section III* of the broader workbook called
*Radical Grace and the Economy*

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Here's the first of 8 issues we'll discuss in this section:

### Selling our Souls

Flooded with scarcity.

Issues

- *We have it all*
  - ✓ If our grandparents could have imagined the extravagant wealth of commodities, conveniences and excitement that so many of us take for granted today — they'd scarcely believe such a blissful fantasy world could exist.
- *We Don't Have Enough*
  - ✓ But if we could tell them that our modern lives are plagued by a nagging scarcity that renders us constantly dissatisfied and clamouring for more — they'd think we've lost our minds, indeed our souls. Perhaps we have.

**Discussion Questions**

1. **Why does a society that's learned to create wealth like never before** feel that they're falling behind and can never get all they want? What's keeping it from them? So have we lost our souls?
2. **Isn't scarcity a fact of life?** Isn't it hopelessly idealistic to say we live in abundance?
3. **Do you chase affluence less** than most other people?

## Insatiable Creatures

The role of scarcity in society and its denial of abundance.

### Issues

- *Scarcity is a Fact of Life*
  - ✓ In this age, scarcity is presented to us as simply a fact of life. We're taught to believe that human beings are insatiable consumers, that we live only to satisfy our infinite wants but we live in a finite world. So scarcity is considered inevitable.
- *Abundance is a Fantasy*
  - ✓ Its opposite — abundance — is seen as a fantasy. When life is constant grasping in a fixed environment, there's no place for abundance. God's bountiful creation has no meaning in this dark view

### Discussion Questions

1. **Are humans really insatiable?** Have we been programmed like robots to be grasping and dissatisfied? Or is it just human nature to always want more?
2. **Is scarcity inevitable?** How can we get ourselves out of a scarcity mindset? Or are we too far gone?
3. **How can we say there's no scarcity** when people are starving?
4. **To what extent do you live** within God's abundance? Isn't there something you never get enough of?

## The Limits of Consumption

Empty consumption, needs and wants, purpose in life.

### Issues

- *Consumption to What End?*
  - ✓ There's a problem with the simplistic ideology of scarcity. Something's been left out of the equation — purpose. To consume endlessly is not a human purpose. To chase satisfaction for no goal beyond chasing even more satisfaction is the way of lower life forms. Humanity is capable of seeking a much higher purpose.
- *Needs vs Wants*
  - ✓ Yes we need to consume for the sustenance we need to pursue our calling. But there are two sides to consumption. One, consumption for its own sake is empty. Two, consuming enough to meet our needs, not to indulge our wants, can be managed with the abundance God has given us.
- *Reach Out and Serve*
  - ✓ People of the spirit recognize that infinite wants are an aberration of the human soul. The purpose of life is not to take in as much as possible. Rather it is to reach out and give oneself over to that greater purpose — to serve others and show them grace — taking in only what we need in order to reach out.

### Discussion Questions

1. **What makes consumption good or bad?** How much do you really need to consume to follow your calling?
2. **Is nature's bounty really enough** for all of us?
3. **Is it placing undue limits on the human imagination** to stop them from wanting more?
4. **How much do you live out the scarcity narrative?** Do you take in only what you need? What do you need it for?

## Franciscan Joy of Self-Denial

The burden of self-indulgence and the liberating path.

### Issues

- *Self-Denial is a Gift*
  - ✓ A prominent component of the *Franciscan Rule of Life* is self-denial. That's not just a masochistic dictate to deprive yourself of things that give you satisfaction. Rather it means to cast aside those empty wants that blind you to your deeper potential and live by your primary needs.
- *It Opens the Path to God*
  - ✓ It is to get rid of excess baggage and noise in your life so you can hear your calling. It's the joy of being on an enlightened path without tripping over all your possessions. It's a life of gratitude for the blessing of taking little from God's abundance.

### Discussion Questions

1. **How big a stretch is it** to convince people of the joy of self-denial? How do we explain it?
2. **Can we start by telling them** that self-indulgence is unhealthy and stifling? Or should we emphasize that nothing is truly satisfying but living one's calling?
3. **Do you personally understand** the joy of self-denial?

## Indigenous Abundance

The indigenous relationship with creation and appreciation of her abundance.

### Issues

- *Healthy Relationship*
  - ✓ Indigenous culture is to live in healthy relationship with creation. To merely extract all you want out of the Creator's body until it's depleted is disrespectful and profane.
- *Scarcity a Poor Fit*
  - ✓ There's no scarcity in a healthy give-and-take with the Creator's world. Indigenous symbiotic culture is very much to live with the abundance we have, taking for oneself as little as practicable from Mother Earth and her children, and being thankful for that. To scramble for more is to create scarcity, an anti-social act.

### Discussion Questions

1. **The indigenous approach, of nurturing all of creation**, is greatly at odds with mainstream culture of taking all one can get for oneself. How can we reconcile these perspectives?
2. **Have you ever advocated an indigenous approach** — to take as little as you can from our Mother Earth and her children and give thanks for the privilege?

## Going Against the Flow

The task of changing the conversation.

### Issues

- *Cultural Pressure*
  - ✓ The constant pressure to consume more and more, coming from an all-powerful marketing industry throughout one's life, makes people vulnerable to the suggestion that that there's never enough and scarcity is life. Abundance is unrealistic. Unsatisfied wants are everything.
- *Bucking the System*
  - ✓ Living to meet one's needs, which are finite and stable, is not on the modern agenda. Our social task — a tall order — is to change that agenda.

### Discussion Questions

1. **How do we de-programme people** and help them conquer their addiction to obsessive consumption?
2. **How do we neutralize** the all-powerful marketing industry?
3. **How do you personally defy** the marketing industry and persuade others to follow a different path?

## Creating a Different Flow

Creation of a movement to build a better life.

### Issues

- *The Dissatisfaction is There*
  - ✓ There exists in modern times an advance guard of people who have a nagging suspicion that spiralling affluence is an empty way of life, and who are responsive to the call for a better quality of life. There are those who worry that chasing scarcity in an upward spiral of acquisition and consumption is putting unbearable stress on the environment. Even self-denial is coming to be seen in a positive light, by a growing number of people who espouse simplicity in life.
- *Seeking a Sub-Culture*
  - ✓ A prospect of living within God's abundance, cultivating modest needs and rejecting excess, and defying that social conditioning that creates scarcity out of greed — raises the hope that a sub-culture can be cultivated.

### Discussion Questions

1. **Where would you look for people on the fence** about consumer culture? What do we have in common with them? How can we work with them?
2. **How do we talk to people who can't resonate** with obsessive consumption, who are already looking for answers, but who don't know the Spirit?

## Dethroning the Marketers

Freeing ourselves from the programming of the marketing industry.

### Issues

- *Time for a Reset*
  - ✓ A society that scrambles for more, more and more commodities as if they're slipping from our grasp — prodded by an all-powerful marketing industry that uses every psychological trick in the book to keep us constantly dissatisfied — has got to go.
- *Confronting a Marketing Monolith*
  - ✓ Marketing needs to lose its grip on the public imagination as well as lose its economic privileges. Government largesse is better directed to incentives that favour less grasping activities and initiatives, and encourage simpler living.

### Discussion Questions

1. **How on earth can we loosen the grip** of the marketing industry? Does it take draconian regulations? Does it take removing big subsidies they should never have had in the first place?
2. **Where should society redirect** the money?
3. **Do you think the marketing culture** can really be changed?

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